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The permanent letter

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## THE PERMANENT BETTER- MENT OF THE CRIPPLED CHILD

BY

DOUGLAS C. McMURTRIE

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# The Permanent Betterment of the Crippled Child

An essay on the operation of the non-residential system of education and care, the social principles involved, and the restoration of crippled children to places as useful members of the community. An account of the work of the Association for the Aid of Crippled Children.

By  
DOUGLAS C. McMURTRIE

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Author G.

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**DOUGLAS C. MCMURTRIE**



**DOUGLAS C. MCMURTRIE  
NEW YORK CITY**

## THE PERMANENT BETTERMENT OF THE CRIPPLED CHILD

The best type of modern philanthropy and the wisest supporters of charitable work are more and more insistently demanding permanent results in place of temporary alleviation. The real value of any work may, therefore, be well measured by the final results it accomplishes. The relative emphasis placed on the various phases of work is also of the highest importance.

What are the essential needs of the crippled child can best be judged by his average circumstances. In most instances when crippled children first come under care they have been largely neglected. Even if willing their families have probably been unable properly to care for them. In some instances they may have had a certain degree of medical care, but even in such cases the social and educational considerations will have been almost wholly neglected.

As a person's point of view is to a great extent conditioned by his environment, so the attitude of the crippled child is determined

by his experience. Shut-in, neglected, deprived of any educational advantages, unable to engage in any form of activity and enduring an existence devoid of any fun or play—the crippled child's attitude may well be one of hopelessness and discouragement. And this point of view seems to be verified repeatedly. He sees his sister start daily for the public school, he sees his brother play in the street during the afternoon and the other members of the family all doing their part in the household duties. And all these are things which the crippled child cannot do and sees no hope of doing.

This attitude is a difficult one to overcome and there is but one way to do it. That is by personal influence and sympathy—by intimate work of the finest sort. By patient effort of this kind, however, it is possible to restore the child's self-respect and to recreate within him, at it were, a hopeful spirit of self-confidence. By proper training more and more of his abilities are revealed to him and there is aroused ambition which is, after all, the main-spring of, and incentive to, all effective endeavor.

After this metamorphosis is effected—and it can be effected by the right kind of effort—it is amazing what the crippled child can accomplish. He is far from the complete wreck we may have thought him. In the first place, we find he has an active mentality fully as vigorous as in a child whose limbs are straight and strong. His progress in school, when he is provided with educational facilities, is astonishingly rapid, for, being free from most of the diverting distractions of childhood, the application to his one activity is all the more intense.

In many other ways the cripple who is started in the right direction evinces unexpected abilities. Several institutions have baseball teams which put up an excellent game, another has a brass band, others have organized drill, and in almost all classes and homes the children engage in regular play and games.

The eventual aim, however, must always be to render the crippled child self-supporting. As the deformity is only local in one part of the body, leaving the remaining members and faculties active, with properly selected trade

instruction the cripple can be rendered independent.

Consider the transformation — turning a hopeless, discouraged cripple into a hopeful, ambitious and self-respecting citizen. Could any change be more complete and more highly to be desired. Yet this result is being accomplished again and again.

Such a change may be pointed to as an example of real and permanent betterment.

And all that needs to be done is to assist the child in overcoming the special handicaps imposed by his deformity and make available to him the advantages which every child in right and justice should have.

In many cases, by proper methods of medical and surgical care, a complete cure can be effected thus disposing of the entire problem. In practically every case definite improvement can be effected and further harm forestalled. In cases requiring constant treatment and nursing, care in a resident hospital or home is demanded. But there is a great class of crippled children whose deformity is less acute and who need less frequent attention. The members of this class do not and will not

receive hospital treatment in the present state of provision for such requirements. The result is that such children remain at home without advantages of any kind and are, of course, unable to attend school. Briefly stated, these children can be excellently provided for by a comprehensive system of visiting nursing, by transporting the children back and forth from their homes to the special classes which are provided for them by the public school system, and by surgical care at the clinics and dispensaries.

It is this sort of work that is being carried on by the Association for the Aid of Crippled Children, which in this way is caring for over a hundred deformed children. With these principles, the nurses are able to perform seeming miracles, for the hopeless, discouraged little mites of humanity are changed into bright ambitious boys and girls, looking forward to the day when they can learn a useful trade and occupy a definite niche in the community.

The nurses ride with the children to and from school each day and visit them in their homes. The home work, however, is always

with the view of supplementing rather than supplanting care from the parents. They first endeavor to enlist the mother's interest in sending her crippled child to school and they then try to fortify this interest by intelligent direction and sympathetic encouragement. Oftentimes the mother has been doing very little for the child, but this is more frequently due to ignorance and inability rather than to intentional neglect. Conditions have often rendered the situation very difficult and the burden of the small cripple in the family has seemed the additional straw which was fatal to the back of the proverbial camel.

When the nurse, however, shows the mother what can be done and demonstrates by practical example that it is as easy to give the child proper, as it is to give improper, care, conditions are materially altered.

The effort is always to have normal needs supplied through the medium of the family, so that the home ties may be preserved unbroken and the child's respect for his parents may remain unimpaired. When the mother is absolutely unable to supply the needs of the child, the nurse is ready with the required

assistance; but it is always given where possible through the medium of the family, so that the child may not come to look for the simplest elements of existence from outsiders. Nothing is more cruel than the situation of a child who has lost respect for his own father and mother.

There is a great deal of influence which the nurse can exert directly upon their little crippled charges. In riding to and from school with the children in the omnibuses each day, the nurse is able to inculcate principles of politeness, honesty and cleanliness. The transformation which can be accomplished in a few weeks with a bus load of children is astonishing.

The general aim of the work is to make the position of the child just as normal as possible. This attitude is further emphasized by the fact that the children attend regular public schools just as do their healthier brothers and sisters. This attendance often marks the realization of a long-cherished dream.

In keeping with this general idea of healthy activity, the Association believes that clinical work and nursing should be excluded from the schools in which the children spend the majority of their time, and as the children belong

to the class which needs only clinical treatment, it is felt that this may as well be given in a hospital. With most of children, however, the necessity for such attention is fairly infrequent.

In a general analysis of the work of the Association it will be seen that the children are really doled out very little charity in the old sense of "almsgiving." As members of the community they are entitled to their education as a right and not as a charity, and the aim of the Association has been to stimulate the provision of such education by the proper authorities, and then to make it possible for the children to avail themselves of their natural birthright.

The children have been receiving support and some type of care at home. The Association merely endeavors to supplement and improve this care by intelligent instruction and sympathetic influence. In short, it enables the children to avail themselves of opportunities which are at hand but which are just beyond their unaided reach.

Such work is free from the charge of being temporary relief only. The instruction of the

families in the elements of proper care and the influence exerted upon the mothers accomplish permanent results—results which are effective long after the child passes from the care of the Association. Starting the child on its educational career accomplishes results which are cumulative in their effect as he progresses. The crippled child has great possibilities; for, with but a little intelligently directed assistance to overcome the special handicaps imposed upon him by his deformity, he can be given the chance to succeed through his own efforts. What the Association does want to do is to guarantee to crippled children the chance to make good themselves and to give to them the square deal of equal opportunity.





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